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AN
E S T I M A T E
K. OF THE
R E L I G I O N
OF THE
FASHIONABLE WORLD.
BY ONE OF THE LAITY.

There was never found, in any age of the world, either
Philosophy, or Sect, or Religion, or Law, or Discipline,
which did so highly exalt the public good as the Chris-
tian Faith. LORD BACON.

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THE
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AN
ESTIMATE
OF THE
RELIGION
OF THE
FASHIONABLE WORLD.

INTRODUCTION.

THE general design of these pages is to offer some cursory remarks on the present state of religion among a great part of the polite and the fashionable; not only among that description of persons

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who,

who, whether from disbelief, or whatever other cause, avowedly neglect the duties of Christianity; but among that more decent class also, who, while they acknowledge their belief of its truth by a public profession, and are not inattentive to any of its forms, yet exhibit little of its spirit in their general temper and conduct: to shew that Christianity, like its divine Author, is not only *denied* by those who in words disown their submission to its authority; but *betrayed* by still more treacherous disciples, even while they say, *Hail, Master!*

For

For this visible declension of piety various reasons have been assigned, some of which however do not seem fully adequate to the effects ascribed to them. The author of a late popular pamphlet * has accounted for the increased profligacy of the *common people*, by ascribing it, very justly, to the increased dissoluteness of their superiors: and who will deny what he affirms—that the general conduct of high and low receives a deep tincture of depravity from the growing neglect of public worship? I must however take the liberty to

* *Hints to an Association, &c. &c.*

diffent from his opinion as to the cause of that neglect; and to suspect that the too common desertion of persons of rank from the service of the Establishment is not occasioned, in general, by their disapprobation of the Liturgy; but that the far greater part of them are deterred from going to church by motives far removed from speculative objections and conscientious scruples.

Far be it from me to enter the unpleasant and boundless fields of controversy; an enterprize for which it would be hard to say whether I
have

have less ability or inclination. Far be it from me to stand forth the fierce champion of a Liturgy, or the prejudiced advocate of forms and systems. A sincere member of the Establishment myself, I respect its institutions without idolatry, and acknowledge its imperfections without palliation.

But the difference of opinion here intimated is not so much about the Liturgy itself, as its imagined effects in thinning the pews of our people of fashion. The slightest degree of observation seems to contradict this

assertion : those however who maintain the other opinion may satisfy their doubts, by enquiring whether the regular and systematic absenters from church are chiefly to be found among the thinking, the reading, the speculative, and the scrupulous part of mankind.

Even the most negligent attendant on public worship must know, that the obnoxious creed, to whose malignant potency this general desertion is ascribed, is never read above three or four Sundays in a year ; and that does not seem a very adequate reason

reason for banishing the most scrupulous and tender consciences from church on the other eight-and forty Sundays.

Besides, there is one test which is absolutely unequivocal—it is never read at all in the *afternoon*, any more than the Litany (another great source of offence); and yet, with all these multiplied reasons for their attendance, that is a season when the pews of the fashionable world are not *remarkable* for being crowded.

On the contrary, is it not pretty

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evident

evident that the general quarrel (with some few exceptions) of those who habitually absent themselves from public worship, is not with the creed, but the commandments? With such, to reform the Prayer Book would go but a little way, unless the New Testament could be also abridged. Cut, and pare, and prune the service of the Church ever so much, still Christianity itself will be found full of formidable objections. With such objectors, it would avail but little that the Church should give up her abstruse creeds, unless the Bible would expunge

punge those rigorous laws, which not only prohibit sinful actions, but corrupt inclinations. And, to speak honestly, I do not see how such persons as habitually infringe the laws of virtue and sobriety, and who yet are men of acute sagacity, accustomed on other subjects to a consistent train of reasoning; who see consequences in their causes; who behold practical self-denial necessarily involved in the sincere habit of religious observances—I do not see how, to such men, any doctrines reformed, any redundancies lopped, any obscurities brightened, could effect

effect this author's very benevolent and christian wish.

For religious duties are often neglected upon more consistent grounds than the friends of religion are willing to allow. They are often discontinued, not as repugnant to the understanding, not as repulsive to the judgment, but as hostile to a licentious life. And when a prudent man, after entering into a solemn convention, finds that he is living in a constant breach of every article of the treaty he has engaged to observe; one cannot much wonder at his getting

ting out of the hearing of the heavy artillery which he knows is planted against him, and against every one who lives in an allowed infraction of the covenant.

A man of sense, who should acknowledge the truth of the doctrine, would find himself obliged to submit to the force of the precept. It is not easy to be a comfortable sinner, without trying, at least, to be a confirmed unbeliever. The smallest remains of faith would embitter a life of libertinism; and to him who retains any impression of Christianity,

the

the wildest festivals of intemperance will be converted into the terrifying feast of Damocles : the suspended sword may every moment fall.

That many a worthy nonconformist is kept out of the pale of the Establishment by some of the causes noticed in the pamphlet in question, cannot be doubted; and that many candid members of that Establishment regret the causes which exclude the others, cannot be denied. But these are often sober thinkers, serious enquirers, conscientious reasoners ; whose object is
truth,

truth, and who spare no pains in search of what they take to *be* truth. But that the same objections banish the great and the gay, is not equally evident. Thanks to the indolence and dissipation of the times, it is not dogmas or doctrines, it is not abstract reasoning or puzzling propositions, it is not perplexed argument or intricate metaphysics, which can now disincline from Christianity; so far from it, they cannot even allure to unbelief. Infidelity itself, with all that strong and natural bias which passion and appetite have in its favour, if it appear in the grave and scholastic

scholastic form of speculation, argument, or philosophical deduction, may lie almost as quietly on the shelf as its most able antagonist; and the cobwebs are almost as seldom brushed from Hobbes as from Hooker. No: prudent scepticism has wisely studied the temper of the times, and skilfully felt the pulse of this relaxed and indolent age. It prudently accommodated itself to the reigning character, when it adopted sarcasm instead of reasoning, and preferred a sneer to an argument. It discreetly judged, that, if it would now gain proselytes, it must
shew

shew itself under the bewitching form of a profane bon-mot; must be interwoven in the texture of some amusing history, written with the levity of a romance, and the point and glitter of an epigram: it must embellish the ample margin with some offensive anecdote or impure allusion, and decorate impiety with every loose and meretricious ornament of a corrupt imagination: it must break up the old flimsy system into little mischievous aphorisms, ready for practical purposes: it must divide the rope of sand into little portable parcels, which the shallow-

est wit can comprehend, and the shortest memory carry away.

Philosophy therefore (as Unbelief, by a patent of its own creation, has lately been pleased to call itself) will not do nearly so much mischief to the present age, as its great apostles intended : since it requires time, application, and patience to peruse the reasoning veterans of the sceptic school ; and these are talents not now very severely devoted to study of any sort, by those who give the law to fashion ; especially since, as it was hinted above, the same principles

ples may be acquired on cheaper terms, and the reputation of being philosophers obtained without the sacrifices of pleasure for the severities of study; since the industry of our literary chemists has extracted the spirit from the gross substance of the old unvendible poison, and exhibited it in the volatile essence of a few sprightly sayings.

If therefore, in this voluptuous age, when a frivolous and relaxing dissipation has infected our very studies, infidelity will not be at the pains of deep research and elaborate investigation, even on such subjects

as are congenial to its affections; it is vain to expect that christianity will be more engaging, either as an object of speculation, or a rule of practice, when its evidences require attention to be comprehended, its doctrines humility to be received, and its precepts self-denial to be embraced.

Will it then be uncharitable to pronounce that the leading evil, not which thins our churches (for that is not the evil I propose to consider), but which pervades our whole character, and gives the colour to our
general

general conduct, is *practical irreligion?* an irreligion not so much opposed to a speculative faith, as to that spirit, temper, and behaviour which christianity inculcates.

On this practical irreligion it is proposed to offer a few hints. After attempting to shew, by a comparison with the religion of the great in preceding ages, that there is a visible decline of piety among the higher ranks—that even those more liberal spirits who neglect not many of the great duties of benevolence, yet hold the severer obligations of piety

in no esteem—I shall proceed, though perhaps with too little method, to remark on the notorious *effects* of the decay of this religious principle, as it corrupts our mode of education, infects domestic conduct, spreads the contagion downwards among servants and inferiors, and influences our manners, habits, and conversation.

But what it is here proposed principally to insist on is, that this defect of religious principle is almost equally fatal, whether it appear in the open contempt of all sacred institutions,

flitutions, or under the more decent veil of external observances, unsupported by such a conduct as is analogous to the christian profession.

I shall proceed with a few remarks on a third class of fashionable characters, who profess to acknowledge christianity as a perfect system of morals, while they deny its divine authority: and conclude with some slight animadversions on the opinion which these maintain, that morality is the whole of religion.

It must be confessed, however, that manners and principles act reciprocally

ciprocally on each other; and are, by turns, cause and effect. For instance—the increased relaxation of morals produces the increased neglect of infusing religious principles in the education of youth: which effect becomes, in its turn, a cause; and in due time, when that cause comes to operate, helps on the decline of manners.

CHAP. I.

*Decline of christianity shewn by a comparative
view of the religion of the great in pre-
ceding ages.*

IF the general position of this lit-
tle tract be allowed, namely,
that religion is at present in no
very flourishing state among those,
whose example, from the high
ground on which they stand, guides
and governs the rest of mankind;

it will not be denied by those, who are ever so superficially acquainted with the history of our country, that this has not always been the case. Those who make a fair comparison must allow, that however the present age may be improved in other important and valuable advantages, yet that there is but little appearance remaining among the great and the powerful of that "righteousness which exalteth a nation;"—that there has been a *moral revolution* in the national manners and principles, very little analogous to that great *political* one of which

which we hear so much; that our public virtue bears little proportion to our public blessings; and that our religion has decreased in a pretty exact proportion to our having secured the means of enjoying it.

That the antipodes to wrong are hardly ever right, was very strikingly illustrated about the middle of the last century, when the fiery and indiscreet zeal of one party was made a pretext for the profligate impiety of the other; who, to the bad principle which dictated a depraved conduct, added the bad taste of being proud

proud of it :—when even the least abandoned were absurdly apprehensive that an appearance of decency might subject them to the charge of fanaticism, a charge in which they took care to involve real piety as well as enthusiastic pretence ; till it became the general fashion to avoid no sin but hypocrisy, to dread no imputation but that of seriousness, and to be more afraid of a good reputation than of every vice which ever earned a bad one.

It was not till piety was thus unfor-

fortunately brought into disrepute, that persons of condition thought it made their sincerity, their abilities, or their good breeding questionable, to appear openly on the side of religion. A strict attachment to piety did not subtract from a great reputation. Men were not thought the worse lawyers, generals, ministers, legislators, or historians, for believing, and even defending, the religion of their country. The gallant Sir Philip Sidney, the rash but heroic Essex, the politic and sagacious Burleigh, the all-accomplished Falkland,

land*, not only publicly owned their belief in christianity, but even wrote some things of a religious nature†. These instances, and many others which might be adduced, are not, it will be allowed, selected from among contemplative recluses, grave divines, or authors by profession; but from busy men

* Lord Falkland assisted the great Chillingworth in his incomparable work, *The Religion of a Protestant*.

† See that equally elegant and authentic work, *The Anecdotes of Royal and Noble Authors*.

of

of strong passions, beset with great temptations; distinguished actors on the stage of life; and whose respective claims to the title of fine gentlemen, brave soldiers, or able statesmen, have never been called in question.

What would the Hales, and the Clarendons, and the Somers's * have said, had they been told that the

* This consummate statesman was not only remarkable for a strict attendance on the public duties of religion, but for maintaining them with equal exactness in his family, at a period too when religion was most discountenanced.

time

time was at no great distance, when that sacred book, for which they thought it no derogation from their wisdom or their dignity to entertain the profoundest reverence, would be of little more use to men in high public stations, than to be the instrument of an oath; and that the sublimest rites of the christian religion would soon be considered as little more than a necessary qualification for a place, or the legal preliminary to an office.

This indeed is the boasted period of free enquiry and liberty of thinking.

ing, and a noble subject of boasting it is. But it is the peculiar character of the present age, that its mischiefs often assume the most alluring forms : and that the most alarming evils not only look so like goodness as to be often mistaken for it ; but are sometimes mixed up with so much real good, as often to disguise, though never to counteract, their malignity. Under the beautiful mask of an enlightened philosophy, all religious restraints are set at nought ; and some of the deadliest wounds have been aimed at christianity, in works written in avowed vindication of

the most amiable of all the christian principles *. Even the prevalence of a liberal and warm philanthropy

* See particularly *Voltaire sur la Tolerance*.

This is a common artifice of that engaging but insidious author. In this instance he has made use of the popularity he obtained in the fanatical tragedy at Thoulouse (the murder of Calas) to discredit, though in the most guarded manner, christianity itself; degrading martyrdom, denying the truth of the Pagan persecutions, &c. &c. And by mixing some truths with many falsehoods, by assuming an amiable candour, and professing to serve the interests of goodness, he treacherously contrives to leave on the mind of the unguarded reader impressions the most unfavourable to christianity.

is

is secretly sapping the foundation of christian morals, because many of its champions allow themselves to live in the open violation of the severer duties of justice and sobriety, while they are contending for the gentler ones of charity and beneficence.

The strong and generous bias in favour of universal toleration, noble as the principle itself is, has engendered a dangerous notion that all error is innocent. Whether it be owing to this, or to whatever other cause, it is certain that the discrimi-

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nating

nating features of the christian religion are every day growing into less repute; and it is become the fashion, even among the better sort, to evade, to lower, or to generalize, its most distinguishing peculiarities *.

* There is so little of the Author of christianity left in his own religion, that an apprehensive believer is ready to exclaim, with the woman at the sepulchre, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." The locality of Hell, and the existence of an Evil Spirit, are annihilated, or considered as abstract ideas. They are never named without some periphrasis or circumlocution; as if the very names, instead of being awful and terrible, were only vulgar and illiberal.

Having

Having wisely and happily freed ourselves from the trammels of human authority, are we not turning our liberty into licentiousness, and wantonly struggling to throw off the *divine* authority too? Freedom of thought is the glory of the human mind, while it is confined within its just and sober limits; but though we are accountable for *opinions* at no earthly tribunal, yet it should be remembered that thoughts as well as actions are amenable to the bar of God: and though we may rejoice that the tyranny of the spiritual Procrustes is so far annihilated, that

it is no longer thought a proof of the orthodoxy of one man's opinions, that he lop or lengthen those of another till they fit his own measure ; yet there is still a standard by which not only actions are weighed, but opinions are judged ; and every sentiment which is clearly inconsistent with the revealed will of God, is as much throwing off *his* dominion, as the breach of any of his moral precepts.

There is then surely one test by which it is no mark of intolerance to try the principles of men, namely,
the

the *Law and the Testimony*: and it is impossible not to lament, that, while a more generous spirit governs our judgment, a purer principle does not seem to regulate our lives. May it not be said, that, while we are justly commended for thinking charitably of the opinions of others, we seem, in return, as if we were desirous of furnishing them with an opportunity of exercising their candour, by the laxity of principle in which we indulge ourselves? If the hearts of men were as firmly united to each other by the bond of charity, as some pretend, they could not fail of being

united to God also, by one common principle of piety, the only certain source of all charitable judgment, as well as of all virtuous conduct.

Instead of abiding by the salutary precept of *judging no man*, it is the fashion to exceed our commission, and to fancy every body to be in a safe state. But, in forming our notions, we have to choose between the Bible and the world, between the rule and the practice. Where these do not agree, it is left to the judgment, of believers at least, by which we are to decide. But we
never

never act, in religious concerns, by the same rule of common sense and equitable judgment which governs us on other occasions. In weighing any commodity, its weight is determined by some generally-allowed standard; and if the commodity be heavier or lighter than the standard weight, we add to or take from it: but we never break, or clip, or reduce the weight to suit the thing we are weighing; because the common consent of mankind has agreed that the one shall be considered as the standard to ascertain the value of the other. But, in weighing our prin-

ciples by the standard of the Gospel, we do just the reverse. Instead of bringing our opinions and actions to the *balance of the sanctuary*, to determine and rectify their comparative deficiencies, we lower and reduce the standard of the scripture doctrines till we have accommodated them to our own purposes; so that, instead of trying others and ourselves by God's unerring rule, we try the truth of God's rule by its conformity or non-conformity to our own depraved notions and corrupt practices.

CHAP.

C H A P. II.

*Benevolence allowed to be the reigning virtue,
but not exclusively the virtue of the present
age. Benevolence not the whole of religion,
though one of its most characteristic features.
Whether benevolence proceed from a religious
principle, will be more infallibly known by
the general disposition of time, fortune, and
the common habits of life, than from a few
occasional acts of bounty.*

TO all the remonstrance and in-
vective of the preceding chap-
ter, there will not fail to be opposed
that

that which we hear every day so loudly insisted on—the decided superiority of the present age, in other and better respects. It will be said that even those who neglect the outward forms of religion, exhibit however the best proofs of the best principles; that the unparalleled instances of charity of which we are continual witnesses; that the many striking acts of public bounty, and the various new and noble improvements in this shining virtue, justly entitle the present age to be called, by way of eminence, *the age of benevolence*.

It

It is with the liveliest joy I acknowledge the delightful truth. Liberality flows with a full tide through a thousand channels. There is scarcely a newspaper but records some meeting of men of fortune for the most salutary purposes. The noble and numberless structures for the relief of distress, which are the ornament and the glory of our metropolis, proclaim a species of munificence unknown to former ages. Subscriptions, not only to hospitals, but to various other valuable institutions, are obtained almost as soon as solicited. And who but must wish
that

that these beautiful monuments of benevolence may become every day more numerous, and more extended?

Yet, with all these allowed and obvious excellencies, it is not quite clear whether something too much has not been said of the liberality of the present age, in a comparative view with that of those ages which preceded it. A general alteration of habits and manners has at the same time multiplied public bounties and private distress; and it is scarcely a paradox to say, that there
was

was probably less misery when there was less munificence.

If an increased benevolence now ranges through and relieves a wider compass of distress; yet still, if those examples of luxury and dissipation which promote that distress are still *more* increased, this makes the good done bear little proportion to the evil promoted. If the miseries removed by the growth of charity fall, both in number and weight, far below those which are caused by the growth of vice and disorder; if we find that, though bounty is extended,
yet

yet those corruptions which make bounty so necessary are extended also, almost beyond calculation; if it appear that, though more objects are relieved by our money, yet incomparably more are debauched by our licentiousness—the balance perhaps will not turn out so decidedly in favour of the times as we are willing to imagine.

If then the most valuable species of charity is that which prevents distress by preventing or lessening vice, the greatest and most inevitable cause of want; we ought not so

highly to exalt the bounty of the great in the present day, in preference to that broad shade of protection, patronage, and maintenance, which the wide-spread bounty of their forefathers stretched out over whole villages, I had almost said whole provinces. When a few noblemen in a county, like a few of their own stately oaks (paternal oaks ! which were not often set upon a card), extended their sheltering branches to shield all the underwood of the forest—when there existed a kind of passive charity, a negative sort of benevolence, which did good
of

of itself; and without effort, exertion, or expence, performed the best functions of bounty, though it did not aspire to the dignity of its name—it was simply this:—great people staid at home; and the sober pomp and orderly magnificence of a noble family, residing at their own castle great part of the year, contributed in the most natural way to the maintenance of the poor; and in a good degree prevented that distress, which it must however thankfully be confessed it is the laudable object of modern bounty to relieve. A man of fortune might not then, it is true, so

so often dine in public; for the benefit of the poor; but the poor were more regularly and comfortably fed with the abundant crumbs which then fell from the rich man's table. Whereas it cannot be denied that the prevailing mode of living has pared real hospitality to the very quick: and, though the remark may be thought ridiculous, it is a material disadvantage to the poor, that the introduction of the modern style of luxury has rendered the remains of the most costly table but of small value.

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But

But even allowing the boasted superiority of modern benevolence, still it will not be inconsistent with the object of the present design, to enquire whether the diffusion of this branch of charity, though the most lovely offspring of religion, be yet any positive proof of the prevalence of religious principle: and whether it is not the fashion rather to consider benevolence as a substitute for christianity, than as an evidence of it.

For it seems to be one of the reigning errors among the better sort, to reduce all religion into benevolence,

volence, and all benevolence into alms-giving. The wide and comprehensive idea of christian charity is compressed into the slender compass of a little pecuniary relief. This species of benevolence is indeed a bright gem among the ornaments of a christian ; but by no means furnishes all the jewels of his crown, which derives its lustre from the associated radiance of every christian grace. Besides, the genuine virtues are all of the same family ; and it is only by being seen in company with each other, and with Piety their common parent, that they are certainly known

to be legitimate ; for there are such things as even spurious virtues.

But it is the property of the *christian* virtues, that, like all other amiable members of the same family, while each is doing its own particular duty, it is contributing to the prosperity of the rest ; and the larger the family the better they live together, as no one can advance itself without labouring for the advancement of the whole : thus, no man can be benevolent on christian principles, without self-denial ; and so of the other virtues : each is connected
with

with some other, and all with religion.

I already anticipate the obvious and hackneyed reply, that "whoever be the instrument, and whatever be the motive of bounty, still the poor are equally relieved, and therefore the end is the same." And it must be confessed that those compassionate hearts, who cannot but be earnestly anxious that the distressed should be relieved at any rate, should not too scrupulously enquire into any cause of which the effect is so beneficial. Nor indeed

will candour scrutinize too curiously into the errors of any life, of which benevolence will always be allowed to be a shining ornament, while it does not pretend to be an atoning virtue.

Let me not be misrepresented as if I were seeking to detract from the value of this amiable feeling ; one does not surely lower the practice by seeking to ennoble the principle ; the action will not be impaired by mending the motive : and no one will be likely to give the poor less because he seeks to please God more.

One

One cannot then help wishing that pecuniary bounty were not only practised, but sometimes enjoined too, as a redeeming virtue. In many conversations, I had almost said in many charity sermons, it is insinuated as if a little alms-giving could pay off old scores contracted by favourite indulgences. This, though often done by well-meaning men to advance the interests of some present pious purpose, yet has the mischievous effect of those medicines which, while they may relieve a local complaint, are yet undermining the general habit.

That great numbers who are not influenced by so high a principle as christianity holds out, are yet truly compassionate, without hypocrisy, and without ostentation, who can doubt? since there are by nature many tender hearts; for did not God make them? and is he not the Author of all that is good in nature, as well as in grace?

But who that feels the beauty of benevolence, can avoid being solicitous, not only that its offerings should comfort the receiver, but return in blessings to the bosom of the
giver,

giver, by springing from such motives, and being accompanied by such a temper, as shall redound to his eternal good? For that the benefit is the same to the object, whatever be the character of the benefactor, is but an uncomfortable view of things to a real christian, whose compassion reaches to the souls of men. Such a one longs to see the charitable giver as happy as he is endeavouring to make the object of his bounty; but such a one knows that no happiness can be fully and finally enjoyed but on the solid basis of christian piety.

For

For as religion is not, on the one hand, merely an opinion or a sentiment ; so neither is it, on the other, merely an act or a performance ; but it is a disposition, a habit, a temper : it is not a name, but a nature : it is a turning the whole mind to God ; a concentration of all the powers and affections of the soul into one steady point, an uniform desire to please *Him*. This desire will naturally and necessarily manifest itself, in our doing all the good we can to our fellow-creatures in every possible way ; for it will be found that neither of the two parts into which
prac-

practical religion is divided, can be performed with any degree of perfection but by those who unite both : as it may be questioned if any man really *does* “ love his neighbour as himself,” who does not first endeavour to “ love God with all his heart.” As genius has been defined to be strong general powers of mind accidentally determined to some particular pursuit ; so piety may be denominated a strong general disposition of the heart to every thing that is right, breaking forth into every excellent action, as the occasion presents itself. The temper
must

must be ready in the mind, and the whole heart must be prepared and trained to every act of virtue to which it may be called out. For religious principles are like the military exercise; they keep up an habitual state of preparation for actual service; and, by never relaxing the discipline, the real christian is ready for every duty to which he may be commanded. Right actions best prove the existence of religion in the heart; but they are evidences, not causes.

Whether therefore a man's charitable

table actions proceed from religious principle, he will be best able to ascertain by scrutinizing into what is the general disposition of his time and fortune; and by attending to such an habitual regulation of his pleasures and expences as will enable him to be more or less useful to others.

For it is in vain that he may possess, what is called by the courtesy of fashion *the best heart in the world* (a character we every day hear applied to the libertine and the prodigal), if he squander his time and
estate

estate in such a round of extravagant indulgences, and thoughtless dissipation, as leaves him little money and less leisure for nobler purposes. It makes but little difference whether a man is prevented from doing good by hard-hearted parsimony or an unprincipled extravagance ; the stream is equally cut off.

The mere *casual* benevolence of any man can have little claim to solid esteem ; nor does any charity deserve the name, which does not grow out of a steady conviction that it is his bounden duty ; which does
not

not spring from a settled propensity to obey the whole will of God; which is not therefore made a part of the general plan of his conduct; and which does not lead him to order the whole scheme of his affairs with an eye to it.

He therefore who does not habituate himself to certain interior restraints, who does not live in a regular course of self-renunciation, will not be likely often to perform acts of beneficence, when it becomes necessary to convert to such purposes any of that time or money which
appetite,

appetite, temptation, or vanity solicit him to divert to other purposes.

And surely he who seldom sacrifices one darling indulgence, who does not subtract one gratification from the incessant round of his enjoyments, when the indulgence would obstruct his capacity of doing good, or when the sacrifice would enlarge his power, does not deserve the name of benevolent. And for such an unequivocal criterion of charity to whom are we to look, but to the conscientious christian? No other spirit but that by which he is governed,

verned, can subdue self-love: and where self-love is the predominant passion, benevolence can have but a feeble, or an accidental dominion.

Now if we look around and remark the excesses of luxury, the costly diversions, and the intemperate dissipation in which numbers of professing christians indulge themselves, can any stretch of candour, can even that tender sentiment by which we are enjoined "to hope" and to "believe all things," enable us to hope and believe that such are actuated by a spirit of christian bene-

F

volence,

violence, merely because we see them perform some casual acts of charity, which the spirit of the world can contrive to make extremely compatible with a voluptuous life, and the cost of which, after all, bears but little proportion to that of any one vice, or even vanity?

Men will not believe that there is hardly any one human good quality which will know and keep its proper bounds, without the restraining influence of religious principle. There is, for instance, great danger lest a constant attention to so right a practice

tice as an invariable œconomy should incline the heart to the love of money. Nothing can effectually counteract this natural propensity but the christian habit of devoting those retrenched expences to some good purpose; and then œconomy, instead of narrowing the heart, will enlarge it, by inducing a constant association of benevolence with frugality. An habitual attention to the wants of others is the only wholesome regulator of our own expences, and carries with it a whole train of virtues, disinterestedness, sobriety and temperance. And those who live

in the custom of levying constant taxes on their vanities for such purposes, serve the poor still less than they serve themselves, by cultivating such habits as make the best qualification for their final happiness.

Thus when a vein of christianity runs through the whole mass of a man's life, it gives a new value to all his actions, and a new character to all his views. It transmutes prudence and œconomy into christian virtues; and every offering that is presented on the altar of charity becomes truly consecrated, when it

is the gift of obedience, and the price of self-denial. Piety is the fire from heaven, which can alone kindle the sacrifice, and make it acceptable.

On the other hand, when any act of bounty is performed by way of composition with one's Maker, either as a purchase, or an expiation of unallowed indulgences; though even in this case, God (who makes all the passions of men subservient to his good purposes) can make the gift equally beneficial to the receiver; yet it is surely not too severe

to say, that to the giver such acts
are an unfounded dependance, a de-
ceitful refuge, a broken staff.

C H A P. III.

*The neglect of religious education both a cause
and consequence of the decline of christianity.
No moral restraints—Religion only inciden-
tally taught, not as a principle of action.
A few of the causes which dispose the young
to entertain low opinions of religion.*

LET not the truly serious be
offended, as if, in the present
chapter, which is intended to treat
of the notorious neglect of religious

education, I meant to confine the spirit of christianity to merely mechanical effects, and to suppose that piety must be the natural and inevitable consequence of early institution. To imply this, would be indeed to betray a lamentable ignorance of human nature, of the disorder sin has introduced, of the inefficacy of human means, and entirely to mistake the genius of our religion. It would be to suppose that God was to depend upon *our* goodness, and not we upon *his*.

Yet it must be allowed that the
Supreme

Supreme Being works chiefly by means; and though it is confessed that no defect of education, no corruption of manners can place any one out of the reach of the divine influences (for it is under such circumstances, perhaps, that the most extraordinary instances of divine grace have been manifested); yet it must be owned that early sobriety, early knowledge of religion, and early habits of piety, are the most probable means of securing the favour of God. To acquire these, is putting ourselves in the way in which

which he himself has told us his blessing is to be found.

But religion is the only thing in which we seem to look for the end, without making use of the means: and yet it would not be more surprising if we were to expect that our children should become artists and scholars, without being bred to arts and languages, than it is to look for a christian world without a christian education.

The noblest objects can yield no delight, if there be not in the mind
a dif-

a disposition to enjoy them, arising from an intelligence of their nature, and a reverence for their value, which can only spring from long habit and early acquaintance. For to produce any capacity of enjoyment, there must be a congruity between the mind and the object. To the mathematician demonstration is pleasure; to the philosopher the study of nature; to the voluptuous the gratification of his appetite; to the poet the pleasures of the imagination. These objects they all respectively pursue as their proper business, as pleasures adapted to that

part

part of their nature which they have been accustomed to indulge and cultivate.

Now, as men will be apt to act consistently with their general views and habitual tendencies, would it not be absurd to expect that the philosopher should look for his sovereign good at a ball, or the sensualist in the pleasures of intellect or piety? None of these ends are answerable to the general views of the respective pursuer; they are not correspondent to his ideas; they are not commensurate to his aims. The sublimest

limest pleasures can afford little gratification where a previous taste has not been cultivated. A clown, who should hear a scholar or an artist talk of the delights of a library, a picture gallery, or a concert, could not guess at the nature of the pleasures they afford; nor would his being introduced to them give him much clearer ideas, because he would bring to them an eye blind to proportion, an understanding new to science, and an ear deaf to harmony.

Shall we expect then, since men can only be scholars by sedulous labour,
that

that they shall be christians by mere chance? Shall we be surpris'd if those do not fulfil the offices of religion, who are not trained to an acquaintance with them? And will it not be obvious that it must be some other thing besides the abstruseness of creeds and opinions which makes christianity unfashionable?

For it will not probably be disputed, that in no age have the passions of youth been so early freed from the *muzzle of restraint*; in no age has the paternal authority been so contemptuously treated, or every
species

species of subordination so disdainfully trampled on. All the shades of discrimination in society seem to be melting into each other. In no age has imprudent fondness been so injuriously lavish, or the supernumerary expences of the college and the school (that prolific seed of corruption) been so prodigally augmented. In no age have the appetites been excited by such early stimulants, and anticipated by such premature indulgences. Never was the shining gloss, the charming novelty of life so early worn off from all enjoyment by excessive use. Never had simple,
and

and natural, and youthful pleasures so early lost their power over the mind; nor was ever one great secret of virtue and happiness, the secret of being cheaply pleased, so little understood.

A taste for costly, or artificial, or tumultuous pleasures cannot be gratified, by their most sedulous pursuers, at every moment; and what wretched management is it in the œconomy of human happiness so to contrive, as that the enjoyment shall be rare and difficult, and the intervals long and languid! Whereas
real

real and unadulterate pleasures occur perpetually to him who cultivates a taste for truth and nature, and science and virtue. But these simple and tranquil enjoyments cannot but be insipid to him, whose passions have been prematurely excited by agitating pleasures, or whose taste has been depraved by such as are debasing and frivolous; for it is of more consequence to virtue than some good people are willing to allow, to preserve the taste pure, and the judgment sound. A vitiated intellect has no small connection with depraved morals.

G

Since

Since amusements of some kind are necessary to all ages (I speak now with an eye to mere human enjoyment), why should it not be as proper to tether man as other animals? Why should not he too be confined, in different stages of life, to certain restricted limitations? since nothing but experience seems to teach him, that, if he be allowed to anticipate his future possessions, and trample all the flowery fields of real as well as those of imaginary and artificial enjoyment, he not only induces present disgust, but defaces and destroys all the rich materials of his future happiness;

pinets; and leaves himself, for the rest of his life, nothing but ravaged fields and barren stubble.

But the great and radical defect, and that which comes more immediately within the present design, seems to be, that in general the characteristical principles of christianity are not early and strongly infused into the mind : that religion is rather taught incidentally, as a thing of subordinate value, than as the leading principle of human actions, and the great animating spring of human conduct. Were the high

influential principles of the christian religion anxiously and early inculcated, we should find that those lapses from virtue, to which passion and temptation afterwards too frequently solicit, would be more easily recoverable.

For though the evil propensities of fallen nature, and the bewitching allurements of pleasure, will too often seduce even those of the best education into devious paths, yet we shall find that men will seldom be incurably wicked, without that internal corruption of principle, which
knows

knows how to justify iniquity, and confirm evil conduct, by the sanction of corrupt reasoning.

The errors occasioned by the violence of passion may be reformed, but systematic wickedness will be only fortified by time; and no decrease of strength, no decay of appetite, can weaken the power of a pernicious principle. He who commits a wrong action indeed, puts himself out of the path of safety; but he who adopts a false principle, not only throws himself into the enemy's country, but burns the

ships, breaks the bridge, cuts off every retreat by which he might hope one day to return into his own.

Surely it will subject no one to the imputation of bigotry or enthusiasm, if he venture to enquire whether the genuine doctrines of christianity are made the standard by which our young men of fashion are commonly taught to try their principles, or to weigh their actions; or whether some more popular standard, of custom, or fashion, or worldly opinion, be not too frequently allowed to supersede them? Whether some idol of false honour

honour be not consecrated for them to worship? Whether, even among the better sort, reputation be not held out as a motive of sufficient energy to produce virtue, in a world where yet the greatest vices are every day practised openly, which do not at all obstruct the reception of those who practise them into the best company? Whether resentment be not ennobled; and pride, and many other passions, erected into honourable virtues—virtues not less repugnant to the genius and spirit of christianity, than obvious and gross vices? Will it be thought impertinent to enquire

if the awful doctrines of a perpetually present Deity, and a future righteous judgment, are early impressed, and lastingly engraven, on the hearts and consciences of our high-born youth?

Perhaps, if there be any one particular in which we fall remarkably below the politer nations of antiquity, it is in that part of education which has a reference to purity of mind, and the discipline of the heart.

For the great secret of religious education, and which seems banished
from

from the present practice, consists in training young men to an habitual interior restraint, an early government of the affections, and a course of self-controul over those tyrannizing inclinations, which have so natural a tendency to enslave the human heart. Without this habit of moral restraint, which is one of the fundamental laws of christian virtue, though men may, from natural temper, often *do* good, yet it is perhaps impossible that they should ever *be* good. Without the vigorous exercise of this controuling principle, the best dispositions, and the most amiable

ble qualities, will go but a little way towards establishing a virtuous character. For the best dispositions will be easily overcome by the concurrence of passion and temptation, in a heart where the passions have not been accustomed to this wholesome discipline: and the most amiable qualities will but more easily betray their possessor, unless the yielding heart be fortified by repeated acts, and long habits, of resistance.

In this, as in various other instances, we may blush at the superiority

riority of Pagan institution. Were the Roman youth taught to imagine themselves always in the awful presence of Cato, in order to habituate them betimes to suppress base sentiments, and to excite such as were generous and noble? And should not the christian youth be continually reminded, that a greater than Cato is here? Should they not be trained to the habit of acting under the constant impression, that *He* to whom they must one day be accountable for intentions, as well as words and actions, is witness to the one as well as the other; that he
not

not only is "about their path," but "understands their very thoughts?"

Were the disciples of a Pagan* leader taught that it was a motive sufficient to compel their obedience to any rule, whether they liked it or not, that it had the authority of their teacher's name? were the bare words, *the master hath said it*, sufficient to settle all disputes, and to subdue all reluctance? And shall the scholars of a more divine teacher, who have a code of laws written by

* Pythagoras.

God

God himself, be contented with a lower rule, or abide by a meaner authority? And is any argument drawn from human considerations likely to operate more forcibly on a dependant being, than that simple but grand assertion, with which so many of the precepts of our religion are introduced—Because, **THUS SAITH THE LORD?**

For it is doing but little, in the infusion of first principles, to obtain the bare assent of the understanding to the existence of one Supreme Power, unless the heart and affections

go

go along with the conviction, by our conceiving of that power as intimately connected with ourselves. A feeling temper will be but little affected with the cold idea of a *geometrical* God, as the excellent Pascal expresses it, who merely adjusts all the parts of matter, and keeps the elements in order. Such a mind will be but little moved, unless he be taught to consider his Maker under the interesting and endearing representation which revealed religion gives of him. That "God is," will be to him rather an alarming than a consolatory idea; till he be persuaded of the subsequent

sequent proposition, that "he is the rewarder of all such as diligently seek him." Nay, if natural religion does even acknowledge one awful attribute, that "God is just;" it will only increase the terror of a tender conscience, till he learn, from the fountain of truth, that he is "the justifier of all who believe on him."

But if the great sanctions of our religion are not deeply engraven on the heart, where shall we look for a more adequate curb to the fiery spirit of youth? For, let the elements be ever so kindly mixed in a human

composition, let the natural temper be ever so amiable, still whenever a man ceases to think himself an accountable being, what motive can he have for resisting a strong temptation to a present good, when he has no dread that he shall thereby forfeit a greater future good?

But it will be objected, that this deep sense of religion would interfere with the general purposes of education, which is designed to qualify men for the business of human life, and not to train up a race of monks and ascetics.

There

There is however so little real solidity in this specious objection, that I am firmly persuaded, that if religious principles were more deeply impressed on the heart, even the things of this world would be much better carried on. For where are we to look for so much punctuality, diligence, application, doing every thing in its proper day (the great hinge on which business turns), as among men of principle? Economy of time, truth in observing his word, never daring to deceive or to disappoint—these are the very essence of a man of business; and for these

to whom shall we most naturally look? Who is so little likely to be "slothful in business," as he who is "fervent in spirit?" Will not he be most regular in dealing with men, who is most diligent in "serving the Lord?"

But, it may be said, allowing that religion does not necessarily spoil a man of *business*; yet it would effectually defeat those accomplishments, and counteract that fine breeding, which essentially constitute the *gentleman*.

This

This again is so far from being a natural consequence, that, supposing all the other real advantages, of parts and education, to be equally taken into the account, there is no doubt but that, in point of true politeness, a real christian would beat the world at its own weapons, the world itself being judge.

For though it must be confessed, that, in the present state of things, other wickedness has made dissimulation necessary; and that being the case, there is scarcely any one invention for which we are more obliged

to mankind than for that of politeness, as there is perhaps no screen in the world which hides so many ugly sights; yet while we allow that there never was so admirable a supplement to real goodness, as good breeding; it is however certain that the principles of christianity put into action, would necessarily produce more genuine politeness than any maxims drawn from motives of human vanity or convenience. If *love, peace, joy, long suffering, gentleness, patience, goodness, and meekness* may be thought instruments to produce sweetness of manners, these we are expressly told
are

are “the fruits of the spirit.” If mourning with the afflicted, rejoicing with the happy; if “to esteem others better than ourselves;” if “to take the lowest room;” if “not to seek our own;” if “not to behave ourselves unseemly;” if “not to speak great swelling words of vanity”—if these are amiable, engaging and polite parts of behaviour; then would the documents of Saint Paul make as true a fine gentleman as the *Courtier of Castiglione*, or even the *Letters of Lord Chesterfield* himself. Then would simulation, and dissimulation, and all the nice shades

and delicate gradations of passive and active deceit, be rendered superfluous; and the affections of every heart be won by a shorter and a surer way, than by the elegant obliquities of this late popular preceptor; whose mischiefs have outlived his reputation; and who, notwithstanding the present just declension of his fame, has helped to relax the general nerve of virtue, and has left a taint upon the public morals, of which we are still sensible.

That self-abasement then, which is inseparable from christianity, and
the

the external signs of which good breeding knows so well how to assume; and those charities which suggest invariable kindness to others, even in the smallest things, would, if left to their natural workings, produce that gentleness which it is one great object of a polite education to imitate. They would produce it too without effort and without exertion; for being inherent in the substance, it would naturally produce itself on the surface.

For however useful the institutions of polished society may be found,

yet they can never alter the eternal difference between right and wrong; or convert appearances into realities; they cannot transform decency into virtue, nor make politeness pass for principle. And the advocates for fashionable breeding should be humbled to reflect that every convention of artificial manners was invented not to *cure*, but to *conceal*, deformity: that though the superficial civilities of elegant life tend to make this corrupt world a more tolerable place than it would be without them; yet they never will be considered as a substitute for truth and virtue by

HIM

HIM who is to pass the definitive sentence on the characters of men.

Among the many prejudices which the young and the gay entertain against religion, one is, that it is the declared enemy to wit and genius. But, says one of its wittiest champions *, “ Piety enjoins no man to be dull :” and it will be found, on a fair enquiry, that though it cannot be denied that irreligion has had able men for its advocates, yet they have never been the most able. Nor can any learned profession, any depart-

* Dr. South.

ment in letters or in science, produce a champion on the side of unbelief, but christianity has a still greater name to oppose to it; philosophers themselves being judges.

But while the young adopt an opinion, from one class of writers, that religious men are weak; they acquire, from another, a notion that they are ridiculous: and this opinion, by mixing itself with their common notions, and deriving itself from their very amusements, is the more mischievous as it is received without resistance or suspicion.

One

One common medium through which they take this false view is, those favourite works of wit and humour, so captivating to youthful imaginations, where no small part of the author's success perhaps has been owing to his dexterously introducing a pious character, with so many virtues that it is impossible not to love him, yet tinged with so many absurdities that it is impossible not to laugh at him. The reader's memory will furnish him with too many instances of what is here meant. The slightest touches of a witty malice can make the best character ridiculous.

lous. It is effected by any little awkwardness, absence of mind, an obsolete phrase, a formal pronunciation, a peculiarity of gesture. Or if such a character be brought, by unsuspecting goodness, and trusting honesty, into some foolish scrape, it will stamp an impression of ridicule so indelible, that all his worth shall not be able to efface it: and the young, who do not always separate their ideas very carefully, shall ever after, by this early and false association, conceive of piety as having something essentially ridiculous in itself.

But

But one of the most infallible arts, by which the inexperienced are engaged on the side of irreligion, is that popular air of candour, good nature and toleration, which it so invariably puts on. While, on the one hand, sincere piety is often accused of moroseness and severity, because it cannot hear the doctrines, on which it founds its eternal hopes, derided without emotion; indifference or unbelief, on the other hand, purchase the praise of candour at an easy price, because they neither suffer grief, nor express indignation, at hearing the most awful truths ridiculed,

diculed, or the most solemn obligations set at nought.

The scoffers whom young people hear talk, and the books they hear quoted, falsely charge their own injurious opinions on christianity, and then unjustly accuse her of being the monster they have made. They dress her up, with the sword of persecution in one hand, and the flames of intolerance in the other; and then ridicule the sober-minded for worshipping an idol which their misrepresentation has rendered as malignant as Moloch. In the mean
time

time they affect to seize on benevolence with exclusive appropriation as their own cardinal virtue, and to accuse of a bigotted cruelty that narrow spirit which points out the perils of licentiousness, and the terrors of a future account. And yet this benevolence, with all its tender mercies, is not afraid nor ashamed to endeavour at snatching away from humble piety the comfort of a present hope, and the bright prospect of a felicity that shall have no end. It does not however seem a very probable means of adding to the stock of human happiness, by plundering mankind

mankind of that principle, by the destruction of which friendship is robbed of its bond, society of its security, patience of its motive, morality of its foundation, integrity of its reward, sorrow of its consolation, life of its balm, and death of its support.

It will not perhaps be one of the meanest advantages of a better state, that as the will shall be reformed, so the judgment shall be rectified; that “evil shall no more be called good,” nor the “churl liberal;” nor the plunderer of our best possession, our prin-

principles, benevolent. Then it will be evident that greater violence could not be done to truth and language than to wrest benevolence from christianity, her most appropriate and peculiar attribute. If benevolence be "good-will to men," it was that which angelic messengers were not thought too high to announce, nor a much higher being than angels too great to teach by his precepts, and to illustrate by his death : it was the criterion, the very watch-word as it were, by which he intended his religion and his followers should be distinguished. "By

I

this

this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." Besides, it is the very genius of christianity to extirpate all selfishness, on whose vacated ground benevolence naturally and necessarily plants itself.

But not to run through all the particulars which obstruct the growth of piety in young persons, I shall only name one more. They hear much declamation from the fashionable reasoners against the contracted and selfish spirit of christianity—that it

is

is of a sordid temper, works for pay,
and looks for reward.

But this jargon of French philosophy, which prates of pure disinterested goodness, acting for its own sake, and equally despising punishment and disdaining recompence, indicates as little knowledge of human nature as of christian revelation, when it addresses man as a being made up of pure intellect, without any mixture of passions, and who can be made happy without hope, and virtuous without fear.

A creature hurried away by the impulse of some impetuous inclination, is not likely to be restrained (if he be restrained at all) by a cold reflection on the beauty of virtue. If the dread of offending God, and incurring his everlasting displeasure, cannot stop him, how shall a weaker motive do it? When we see that the powerful sanctions which religion holds out are too often an ineffectual curb: to think of attaining the same end by feebler means, is as if one should expect to make a watch go the better by breaking the main spring; nay, as absurd as if the

philosopher who inculcates the doctrine, should undertake with one of his fingers to lift an immense weight, which had resisted the powers of the crane and the lever.

On calm and temperate spirits indeed, in the hour of retirement, in the repose of the passions, in the absence of temptation, virtue does seem to be her own adequate reward ; and very lovely are the fruits she bears, in preserving health, credit, and fortune. But on how few will this principle act ! and even on them how often will its operation be sus-

pended ! And though virtue for her own sake might have captivated a few hearts, which almost seem cast in a natural mould of goodness ; yet no motive could, at all times, be so likely to restrain even these, under the pressure of temptation, as this simple assertion—*For all this, God will bring me into judgment.*

But it is the beauty of our religion, that it is not held out exclusively to a few select spirits ; that it is not an object of speculation, or an exercise of ingenuity, but a *rule of life*, suited to every condition, capacity, and

and temper. It is the glory of the christian religion to *be*, what it was the glory of every pagan institution *not* to be, the *religion of the people*; and that which constitutes its characteristic value, is its suitableness to the genius, condition, and necessities of all mankind.

For with whatever obscurities it has pleased God to shadow some parts of his written word, yet he has graciously ordered that whatever is necessary should be perspicuous also: and though "clouds and darkness are the habitation of his throne,"

yet they are not the medium through which he has left us to discover our duty. In this, as in all other points, it has a decided superiority over all the ancient systems of philosophy, which were always in many respects impracticable and extravagant, because not framed from observations drawn from a perfect knowledge "of what was in man." Whereas the whole scheme of the Gospel is accommodated to real human nature; laying open its mortal disease, presenting its only remedy; exhibiting rules of conduct, often difficult indeed, but never impossible; and where the
rule

rule was so high that the practicability seemed desperate, holding out a living pattern, to elucidate the doctrine and to illustrate the precept : offering every where the clearest notions of what we have to hope, and what we have to fear ; the strongest injunctions of what we are to believe ; and the most explicit directions of what we are to do.

In short, whoever examines the wants of his own heart, and the appropriated assistance which the Gospel furnishes, will find them to be two tallies which exactly correspond—
an

an internal evidence, stronger perhaps than any other, of the truth of revelation.

This is the religion with which the ingenuous hearts of youth should be warmed, and by which their spirits, while pliant, should be directed. This will afford a “lamp to their paths,” stronger, steadier, brighter than the feeble and uncertain glimmer of a cold and comfortless philosophy.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

Other symptoms of the decline of christianity—

*No family religion—Corrupt or negligent
example of superiors—The self-denying and
evangelical virtues held in contempt—Ne-
glect of encouraging and promoting religion
among servants.*

IT was by no means the design of
the present undertaking to make
a general invective on the corrupt
state of manners, or even to animad-
vert on the conduct of the higher
ranks, but inasmuch as the cor-
ruption

ruption of that conduct, and the depravation of those manners, appear to be a natural consequence of the visible decline of religion.

Of the other obvious causes which contribute to this decline of morals little will be said. Nor is the present a romantic attempt to restore the simplicity of primitive manners. This is too literally an age of gold, to expect that it should be so in the poetical and figurative sense. It would be unjust and absurd not to form our opinions and expectations from the present general state of society. And it would argue great
igno-

ignorance of the corruption which commerce, and conquest, and riches, and arts necessarily introduce into a state, to look for the same sober-mindedness, simplicity, and purity among the *dregs of Romulus*, as the severe and simple manners of elder Rome presented.

But though it would be an attempt of desperate hardihood, to controvert that maxim of the witty bard, that

To mend the world's a vast design ;

yet to make the best of the times
in which we live ; to fill up the
measure

measure of our own actual, particular, and individual duties; and to take care that the age shall not be the worse for our having been cast into it, seems to be the bare dictate of common probity, and not a romantic flight of impracticable perfection.

But is it then so very chimerical to imagine that the benevolent can be sober-minded? Is it romantic to desire that the good should be consistent? Is it absurd to fancy that what has once been practised should not now be impracticable?

I

It

It is impossible then not to help regretting that it should be the general temper of many of the leading persons of that age which arrogates to itself the glorious character of the *age of benevolence*, to be kind, and considerate, and compassionate, every where rather than at home: that the rich and the fashionable should be zealous in promoting religious as well as charitable institutions abroad, and yet discourage every thing which looks like religion in their own families: that they should be at a considerable expence in instructing the poor at a distance, and yet discredit piety

piety among their own servants—those more immediate objects of every man's attention whom Providence has enabled to keep any; and for whose conduct he will be finally accountable, inasmuch as he has helped to corrupt it.

Is there any degree of pecuniary bounty without doors which can counteract the mischief of a wrong example at home; or atone for that infectious laxity of principle, which spreads corruption wherever its influence extends? Is not he the best benefactor to society who sets
the

the best example, and who does, not only the most good, but the least evil? Will not that man, however liberal, very imperfectly promote virtue in the world at large, who neglects to disseminate the principles of it within the immediate sphere of his own personal influence, by a sober conduct and a blameless behaviour? Can a generous but profligate person atone by his purse for the disorders of his life, or expect a blessing on his bounties, while he defeats their effect by a profane conversation?

K

In

In moral as well as political treatises, it is often asserted that it is a great evil to do no good : but it has not been perhaps enough insisted on, that it is a great good to do no evil. This species of goodness is not ostentatious enough for popular declamation ; and the value of this abstinence from vice is perhaps not well understood but by christians, because it wants the ostensible brilliancy of actual performance.

But as the *principles* of christianity are in no great repute, so their concomitant *qualities*, the evangelical virtues,

virtues, are proportionably disesteemed. But those secret habits of self-controul, those interior and unobtrusive virtues, which excite no astonishment, kindle no emulation, and extort no praise, are yet the most difficult, and the most sublime; and, if christianity be true, will be the most graciously accepted by *him* who witnesses the secret struggle and the silent victory: while the splendid deeds which have the world for their witness, and immortal fame for their reward, shall perhaps cost him who achieved them less than it costs a conscientious christian to subdue

one irregular inclination; a conquest which the world will never know, and if it did, would probably despise.

For though great actions performed on human motives are permitted, by the great Disposer, to be equally beneficial to society with such as are performed on purer principles; yet it is an affecting consideration, that, at the final adjustment of accounts, the politician who *raised* a state, or the hero who *preserved* it, may miss of that favour of God, which, if it was not his motive, will
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probably not be his reward. And it is awful to reflect, as we visit the monuments justly raised by public gratitude, or the statues properly erected by well-earned admiration, on what may now be the unalterable condition of the illustrious object of these deserved honours; and that he who has saved a state may have lost his own soul.

A christian life seems to consist of two things, almost equally difficult; the adoption of good habits, and the excision of such as are evil. No one

sets out on a religious course with a stock of native innocence, or actual freedom from sin; for there is no such state in human life. The natural heart is not a blank paper, whereon the divine spirit has nothing to do but to stamp characters of goodness; but many blots and defilements are to be erased, as well as fresh impressions to be made.

The vigilant christian therefore, who acts with an eye to the approbation of his Maker, rather than to that of mankind; to a future account, rather than to present glory; will

will find, that, diligently to cultivate the "unweeded garden" of his own heart; to mend the soil; to clear the ground of its indigenous vices, by practising the painful business of extirpation; will be that part of his duty which will cost him most labour, and bring him least credit: while the fair flower of one shewy action, produced with little trouble, and of which the pleasure is reward enough, shall gain him more praise than the eradication of the rankest weeds which over-run the natural heart.

But the Gospel judges not after

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the manner of men; for it never fails to make the abstinent virtues a previous step to the right performance of the operative ones; and the relinquishing what is wrong to be a necessary prelude to the performance of what is right. It makes "ceasing to do evil" the indispensable preliminary to "learning to do well." It continually suggests that something is to be laid aside as well as to be practised. We must "hate vain thoughts" before we can "love God's law." We must lay aside "malice and hypocrisy," to *enable* us "to receive the engrafted word."

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—Having “a conscience void of offence;” “abstaining from fleshly lusts;” “bringing every thought into obedience”—these are actions, or rather negations, which, though they never will obtain immortality from the chisel of the statuary, the declamation of the historian, or the panegyric of the poet, serve however to constitute the true christian temper, to promote heavenly mindedness, and to procure the divine favour.

And for our encouragement, it is observable that a more difficult christian

tian virtue generally involves an easier one. An habit of self-denial in permitted pleasures easily induces a victory over such as are unlawful. And to sit loose to our own possessions, necessarily includes an exemption from coveting those of others; and so on of the rest.

Will it be difficult then to trace back to that want of early restraint noticed in the preceding chapter, that licence of behaviour which, having been indulged in youth, afterwards reigns uncontrouled in families; and having infected education

education in its first springs, taints all the streams of domestic virtue? Nor is it strange that that same want of religious principle which corrupted our children, should corrupt our servants.

We scarcely go into any company without hearing some invective against the increased profligacy of this order of men; and the remark is made with as great an air of astonishment, as if the cause of the complaint were not as visible as the truth of it. It would be endless to point out instances in which the increased

creased dissipation of their betters (as they are oddly called) has contributed to the growth of this evil. But it comes only within the immediate design of the present undertaking, to insist on the single circumstance of the almost total extermination of religion in fashionable families, as a cause, adequate of itself, to any consequence which depraved morals can produce.

Is there not a degree of injustice in persons who discover strong indignation at those crimes which crowd our prisons, and furnish
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our incessant executions, and yet discourage not an internal principle of vice; since those crimes are nothing more than that principle put into action? And it is no less absurd than cruel in such of the great as lead disorderly lives, to expect to prevent vice by the laws they make to restrain or punish it, while their own example is a perpetual source of temptation to commit it. If by their own practice they demonstrate that they think a vicious life is the only happy one, with what colour of justice can they inflict penalties on others, who, by acting on the same principle,

principle, expect the same indulgence?

And indeed it is somewhat unreasonable to expect very high degrees of virtue and probity from a class of people whose whole life, after they are admitted into dissipated families, is one continued counteraction of the principles in which they have probably been bred.

When a poor youth is transplanted from one of those excellent institutions which do honour to the present age, and give some hope of reforming

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ing the next, into the family, perhaps, of his noble benefactor, who has provided liberally for his instruction; what must be his astonishment at finding the manner of life to which he is introduced diametrically opposite to that life, to which he has been taught that salvation is alone annexed! He has been trained in a wholesome terror of gaming: but now his interests and passions are forcibly engaged on the side of play, since the very profits of his place are made *systematically* to depend on the card-table. He has been taught that it was his bounden duty to be devoutly

thankful for his own scanty meal,
perhaps of barley bread; yet he sees
his noble lord sit down every day,

Not to a dinner, but a hecatomb;

To a repast for which every element
is plundered, and every climate im-
poverished; for which nature is
ransacked, and art is exhausted;
without even the formal ceremony
of a slight acknowledgment. It
will be lucky for the master, if his
servant does not happen to know
that even the pagans never sat down
to a repast without making a libation
to their deities; and that the Jews
did not eat a little fruit, or drink a
cup

cup of water, without an expression of devout thankfulness.

Next to the law of God, he has been taught to reverence the law of the land; and to respect an act of parliament next to a text of Scripture: yet he sees his honourable protector, publicly in his own house, engaged in the evening in playing at a game expressly prohibited by the laws, and against which perhaps he himself had assisted in the day to pass an act.

While the contempt of religion

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was confined to wits and philosophers, the effect was not so sensibly felt. But we cannot congratulate the ordinary race of mortals on their emancipation from old prejudices, or their indifference to sacred usages; as it is not at all visible that the world is become happier in proportion as it is become more enlightened. We might rejoice more in the boasted diffusion of light and freedom, were it not apparent that bankruptcies are grown more frequent, robberies more common, divorces more numerous, and forgeries more extensive—that more rich men die by their own
hand,

hand, and more poor men by the hand of the executioner—than when christianity was practised by the vulgar, and countenanced, at least, by the great.

Is it not to be regretted therefore, while the affluent are encouraging so many admirable schemes for promoting religion among the children of the poor, that they do not like to *perpetuate* the principle, by encouraging it in their servants also? Is it not pity, since these are so moderately furnished with the good things of this life, to rob them of that bright

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reversion,

reversion, the bare hope of which is a counterpoise to all the hardships they undergo here—especially since, by diminishing this future hope, we shall not be likely to add to their present usefulness?

Still allowing, what has been already granted, that absolute infidelity is not the reigning evil, and that servants will perhaps be more likely to see religion neglected than to hear it ridiculed; would it not be a meritorious kindness, in families of a better stamp, to furnish them with more opportunities of learning
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and practising their duty? Is it not impolitic indeed, as well as unkind, to refuse them any means of having impressed on their consciences the operative principles of christianity? It is but little, barely not to *oppose* their going to church, or doing their duty at home, unless their opportunities of doing both are facilitated, by giving them, at certain seasons, as few employments as possible that may interfere with both. Even when religion is by pretty general consent banished from our families, that only furnishes a stronger reason why our families should not

be banished from religion in the churches.

But if these opportunities are not made easy and convenient to them, their superiors have no right to expect from them a zeal so far transcending their own, as to induce them to surmount difficulties for the sake of their duty. Religion is never once represented in scripture as a light attainment; it is never once illustrated by an easy, a quiet, or an indolent allegory. On the contrary, it is exhibited under the active figure of a combat, a race; something expressive

pressive of exertion, activity, progress. And yet many are unjust enough to think that this warfare can be fought, though they are perpetually weakening the vigour of the combatant; this race be run, though they are incessantly obstructing the progress of him who runs by some hard and interfering command. That that compassionate judge who cannot but be particularly touched with the feeling of *their* infirmities, will tenderly allow for their trials, and be merciful to their failings, can never be doubted; but what portion of that forgiveness he

will extend to those who lay on their virtue hard burdens "too heavy for them to bear," who shall say?

To keep any immortal being in a state of spiritual darkness, is a positive disobedience to *His* law, who when he bestowed the Bible, no less than when he created the material world, said, *Let there be light*. It were well for both the advantage of master and servant, that the latter should have the doctrines of the Gospel frequently impressed on his heart, that his conscience should be made familiar with a system which offers
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such clear and intelligible propositions of moral duty. The striking interrogation, "how shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" will perhaps operate as forcibly on an uncultivated mind, as the most eloquent essay, to prove that man is not an accountable being. That once credited promise, that "they who have done well shall go into everlasting life," will be more grateful to the spirit of a plain man, than that more elegant and disinterested aphorism, that *virtue is its own reward*. That "he that walketh uprightly walketh surely," is not on
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the whole a dangerous or a misleading maxim. And "well done, good and faithful servant ! I will make thee ruler over many things," though offensive to the liberal spirit of philosophic dignity, is a comfortable support to humble and suffering piety. That "we should do to others as we would they should do to us," is a portable and compendious measure of social duty, always at hand, as always referring to something within himself, not amiss for a poor man to carry constantly about with him, who has neither time nor learning to search for a better. All

Seneca's

Seneca's arguments against the fear of death, never yet reconciled one reader to its approach, half so effectually as the humble believer is reconciled to it by that simple persuasion, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

While the modern philosopher is extending the boundaries of human knowledge, by undertaking to prove that matter is eternal; or enlarging the stock of human happiness, by demonstrating the extinction of spirit: it can do no harm to an unlettered man to believe, that "heaven
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and earth shall pass away, but God's word shall not pass away." While the former is indulging the profitable enquiry why the Deity made the world so late, or why he made it at all, it will not hurt the latter to believe that "in the beginning God made the world," and that in the end "he shall judge it in righteousness." While the one is criticising the creed, he will be no loser by encouraging the other to keep the commandments.

For it is a very valuable part of christianity, that though it is an entire

ture and perfect system in its design; though it exhibits one great plan, from which complete trains of argument, and connected schemes of reasoning, may be deduced; yet in compassion to the multitude, for whom this benevolent institution was in a good measure designed, and who could not have comprehended a long chain of propositions, or have embraced remote deductions, the most important truths of doctrine, and the most essential documents of virtue, are detailed in single maxims, and comprised in short sentences; independent of themselves, yet making

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ing a necessary part of a consummate whole; from a few of which elementary principles the whole train of human virtues has been deduced, and many a perfect body of ethics has been framed.

C H A P. V.

The negligent conduct of christians no real objection against christianity.—The reason why its effects are not more manifest to worldly men, is, because believers do not lead christian lives.—Professors differ but little in their practice from unbelievers.—Even real christians are too diffident and timid, and afraid of acting up to their principles.—The absurdity of the charge commonly brought against serious people, that they are too strict.

IT is an objection frequently brought against christianity, that if it exhibited so perfect a scheme,
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if its influences were as strong, if its effects were as powerful, as its friends pretend, it must have produced more visible consequences in the reformation of mankind. This is not the place fully to answer this objection, which (like all the other cavils against our religion) continues to be urged just as if it never *had* been answered.

That vice and immorality prevail in no small degree in countries professing christianity, we need not go out of our own to be convinced. But that this is the case only because

this benign principle is not suffered to operate in its full power, will be no less obvious to all who are sincere in their enquiries. For, if we allow (and who that examines impartially can help allowing?) that it is the natural tendency of christianity to make men better, then it must be the aversion to receiving it, and not the fault of the principle, which prevents them from becoming so.

Those who are acquainted with the effects it actually produced in the first ages of the church, when it *was* received in its genuine purity,

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and when it *did* operate without obstruction, from its *followers* at least, will want no other proof of its inherent power and efficacy. At that period, its most decided and industrious enemy, the emperor Julian, could recommend the *manners* of the Galileans to the imitation of his pagan high priest; though he himself, at the same time, was doing every thing which the most inveterate malice, sharpened by the acutest wit, and backed by the most absolute power, could devise, to discredit their doctrines.

Nor

Nor would the efficacy of christianity be less visible now, in influencing the conduct of its professors, if its principles were heartily and sincerely received. They would operate on the conduct so effectually, that we should see morals and manners growing out of principles, as spontaneously and necessarily as we see other consequences grow out of their proper and natural causes. Let but this great spring have its unobstructed play, and there would be little occasion to declaim against this excess or that enormity. If the same skill and care which are em-

ployed in curing symptoms, were vigorously levelled at the internal principle of the disease, the moral health would feel the benefit. If that attention which is bestowed in lopping the redundant and unsightly branches were devoted to the cultivation of a sound and uncorrupt root, the effect of this labour would soon be discovered by the excellence of the fruits.

For though, even in the highest possible exertion of religious principle, and the most diligent practice of all its consequential train of virtues,

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man would still find evil propensities enough, in his fallen nature, to make it necessary that he should counteract them, by keeping alive his diligence after higher attainments, and to quicken his aspirations after a better state; yet the prevailing temper would be in general right, the will would be in a great measure rectified; and the heart, feeling and acknowledging its disease, would apply itself diligently to the only remedy. For though even the best men have infirmities enough to deplore, commit sins enough to keep them deeply humble, and feel more

sensibly than others the imperfections of that vessel in which their heavenly treasure is hid : these however have the internal consolation of knowing that they shall have to reckon with one who “ knoweth whereof they are made ; ” who will accept of faith and repentance instead of sinless perfection, and of humble sincerity in lieu of entire holiness.

All the heavy charges which have been brought against religion, have been taken from the abuses of it. In every other instance the injustice
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of this proceeding would be notorious: but there is a general want of candour in the judgment of men on this subject, which we do not find them exercise on other occasions; that of throwing the fault of the erring or ignorant professor on the profession itself.

It does not derogate from the honourable profession of arms, that there are cowards and braggarts. If any man lose his estate by the chicanery of an attorney, or his health by the blunder of a physician, it is commonly said that the one was a

disgrace to his business, and the other was ignorant of it; but no one therefore concludes that law and physic are contemptible professions.

Christianity alone is obliged to bear all the obloquy incurred by the misconduct of its followers; to sustain all the reproach excited by ignorant, by fanatical, by superstitious, or hypocritical professors. But whoever accuses it of a tendency to produce the errors of these professors, must have picked up his opinion any where rather than in the New Testament, which being the
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only authentic history of christianity, is that which candour would naturally consult for information.

But as worldly and irreligious men do not draw their notions from that pure fountain, but from the polluted stream of human practice; as they form their judgment of divine truth from the conduct of those who pretend to be enlightened by it; some charitable allowance *must* be made for the contempt which they entertain for christianity, when they see what poor effects it produces in the lives of the generality

ality of professing christians. What do they observe there which can lead them to entertain very high ideas of the principles which give birth to such practices?

Do men of the world discover any marked, any decided difference between the conduct of nominal christians, and that of the rest of their neighbours who pretend to no religion at all? Do they see, in the daily lives of such, any great abundance of those fruits by which they have heard believers are to be known? On the contrary, do they not discern
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in them the same anxious and unwearied pursuit after the things of earth, as in those who do not profess to have any thought of Heaven? Do not they see them labour assiduously in the interests of a debasing and frivolous dissipation, as those who do not pretend to have any nobler object in view? Is there not the same eagerness to plunge into all sorts of follies themselves, and the same unrighteous speed in introducing their children to them, as if they had never entered into a solemn engagement to renounce them? Is there not the same self-indulgence,

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the same luxury, and the same passionate attachment to the things of this world in them, as is visible in those who do not look for another ?

Do not thoughtless neglect, and habitual dissipation, answer, as to society, all the ends of the most decided infidelity ? Between the barely decent and the openly profane there is indeed this difference ; that the one, by making no profession, deceives neither the world nor his own heart ; while the other, by intrenching himself in forms, fancies that he does something, and thanks God that “ he

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is not like this publican." The one only shuts his eyes upon the danger which the other despises.

But these unfruitful professors would do well to recollect, that, by a conduct so little worthy of their high calling, they not only violate the law to which they have vowed obedience, but occasion many to disbelieve or to despise it; that they are thus in a great measure accountable for the infidelity of others, and of course will have to answer for more than their own personal offences. For did they in any respect
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live up to the principles they profess; did they adorn the doctrines of christianity by a life in any degree consonant to their faith; did they exhibit any thing of the “beauty of holiness” in their daily conversation; they would then give such a demonstrative proof, not only of the sincerity of their own obedience, but of the brightness of that divine light by which they profess to walk, that the most determined unbeliever would at last begin to think there must be *something* in a religion of which the effects were so visible, and the fruits so amiable; and might in time be

led to "glorify," not *them*, not the imperfect doers of these works, but "their Father which is in heaven." Whereas, as things are at present carried on, the obvious conclusion must be, either that christians do not believe in the religion they profess, or that there is no truth in the religion itself.

For will he not naturally say, that, if its influences were so predominant, its consequences must be more evident? that, if the prize held out were really so bright, those who truly believed so would surely do something

thing, and *sacrifice* something, to obtain it?

This effect of the careless conduct of believers on the hearts of others, will probably be a heavy aggravation of their own guilt at the final reckoning: and there is no negligent christian can guess where the infection of his example may stop; or how remotely it may be pleaded as a palliation of the sins of others, who either may think themselves safe while they are only doing what *christians* allow themselves to do; or who may adduce a christian's habitual violation

violation of the divine law, as a presumptive evidence that there is no truth in christianity.

This swells the amount of the actual mischief beyond calculation. And there is something terrible in the idea of this sort of indefinite evil, that the careless christian can never know the extent of the contagion he spreads, nor the multiplied infection which *they* may communicate in *their* turn, whom *his* disorders first corrupted.

And there is this farther aggrava-

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tion of his offence, that he will not only be answerable for all the positive evil of which his example is the cause; but for the omission of all the probable good which might have been called forth in others, had *his* actions been consistent with his profession. What a strong, what an almost irresistible conviction would it carry to the hearts of unbelievers, if they beheld that characteristic difference in the manners of christians, which their profession gives one a right to expect! if they saw that disinterestedness, that humility, sober-mindedness, temperance, simplicity,

simplicity, and sincerity, which are the unavoidable fruits of a genuine faith!

But, while a man talks like a saint, and yet lives like a sinner; while he professes to believe like an apostle, and yet leads the life of a sensualist; talks of an ardent faith, and yet exhibits a cold and low practice; boasts himself the disciple of a meek master, and yet is as much a slave to his passions as they who acknowledge no such authority; while he appears the proud professor of an humble religion, or the intemperate champion

of a self-denying one : such a man brings christianity into disrepute ; confirms those in error who might have been awakened to conviction ; strengthens doubt into disbelief, and hardens indifference into contempt. /

Even among those of a better cast, and a purer principle, the excessive restraints of timidity, caution, and that “fear of man, which bringeth a snare,” confine, and almost stifle the generous spirit of an ardent exertion in the cause of religion. Christianity may pathetically expostulate, that it is not always “an open enemy
which

which dishonours her," but her "familiar friend." And, "what dost thou more than others?" is a question which even the good and worthy should often ask themselves, in order to quicken their zeal; to prevent the total stagnation of unexerted principles, on the one hand; or the danger, on the other, of their being driven down the gulf of ruin, by the unresisted and confluent tides of temptation, fashion, and example.

In a very strict and mortified age, of which a scrupulous severity was the predominant character, precau-

tions against an excessive zeal might, and doubtless would, be a wholesome and prudent measure. But in these times of relaxed principle and frigid indifference, to see people so vigilantly on their guard against the imaginary mischiefs of enthusiasm, while they run headlong into the real opposite perils of a destructive licentiousness, puts one in mind of the one-eyed animal in the fable; who, living on the banks of the ocean, never fancied he could be destroyed any way but by drowning: but, while he kept that one eye constantly fixed on the sea, on which

side

side he concluded all the peril lay, he was devoured by an enemy on the dry land, from which quarter he never suspected any danger.

Are not the mischiefs of an enthusiastic piety insisted on with as much earnestness as if an extravagant devotion were the prevailing propensity? Is not the necessity of moderation as vehemently urged as if an intemperate zeal were the epidemic distemper of the great world? as if all our apparent danger and natural bias lay on the side of a too rigid austerity, which required the discreet and constant counteraction of an

opposite principle? Would not a stranger be almost tempted to imagine, from the frequent invectives against extreme strictness, that abstraction from the world, and a monastic rage for retreat, were the ruling temper; that we were in some danger of seeing our places of diversion abandoned; and the enthusiastic scenes of the *Holy Fathers of the desert* acted over again by the frantic and uncontrollable devotion of our young persons of fashion?

It is seriously to be regretted, in an age like the present, remarkable for indifference in religion and levity
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in manners, and which stands so much in need of lively patterns of firm and resolute piety, that many who really are christians on the soberest conviction, should not appear more openly and decidedly on the side they have espoused; that they assimilate so very much with the manners of those about them (which manners they yet scruple not to disapprove); and, instead of an avowed but prudent steadfastness, which might draw over the others, appear evidently fearful of being thought precise and over-scrupulous; and actually seem to disavow their right principles, by concessions and ac-

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commodations not strictly consistent with them. They often seem cautiously afraid of *doing too much*, and *going too far*; and the dangerous plea, the necessity of *living like other people*, of *being like the rest of the world*, and the propriety of *not being particular*, is brought as a reasonable apology for a too yielding and indiscriminate conformity.

But, at a time when almost all are sinking into the prevailing corruption, how beautiful a rare, a single integrity is, let the instances of Lot and Noah declare. And to those with whom a poem is an higher
authority

authority than the Bible, let me recommend the most animated picture of a righteous singularity that ever was delineated, in

——The Seraph Abdiel, faithful found
Among the faithless, faithful only he;
Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
Unshaken, unseduc'd, untterrified,
His loyalty he kept, his love and zeal:
Nor NUMBERS, NOR EXAMPLE with him
wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,
Tho' SINGLE.

PAR. LOST, b. iv.

Few indeed of the more orderly and decent have any objection to that degree of religion which is compatible with their general acceptance

ceptance with others, or the full enjoyment of their own pleasures. For a formal and ceremonious exercise of the outward duties of christianity may not only be kept up without exciting censure, but will even procure a certain respect and confidence; and is not quite irreconcilable with a voluptuous and dissipated life. So far many go; and so far “as godliness is profitable to the life that *is*,” it passes without reproach.

But as soon as men begin to consider religious exercises not as a decency, but a duty; not as a commutation

mutation for a self-denying life, but as a means to promote a holy temper, and a virtuous conduct: as soon as they feel disposed to carry the effect of their devotion into their daily life: as soon as their principles discover themselves, by leading them to withdraw from those scenes, and abstain from those actions, in which the gay place their supreme happiness: as soon as something is to be *done*, and something is to be *parted with*; then the world begins to take offence, and to stigmatize the *activity* of that piety, which had been commended as long as it remained *inoperative*, and had only evaporated in *words*.

But

But when religion, like the vital principle, takes its seat in the heart, and sends out supplies of life and heat to every part; diffuses motion, soul, and vigour, through the whole circulation; and informs and animates the whole man: when it operates on the practice, influences the conversation, breaks out into a lively zeal for the honour of God, and the best interests of mankind: then the sincerity, or the understanding, of that person will become questionable: and it must be owing to a very fortunate combination of circumstances indeed, if he can at
once

once preserve the character of parts and piety.

But it is a folly to talk of being too holy, too strict, or too good. Where there happens to appear some foundation for the charge of enthusiasm (as there are indeed too often in good people eccentricities which justify the censure), we may depend upon it, that it proceeds from some defect in the judgment, and not from any excess in the piety ; for in goodness there is no excess : and it is as preposterous to say that any one is too good, or too pious, as that he is too wise, too strong, or too healthy:

since

since the highest point in all these is only the perfection of that quality which we admired in a lower degree. There may be an *imprudent*, but there cannot be a *superabundant* goodness. An ardent imagination may mislead a rightly turned heart; and a weak intellect may incline the best intentioned to ascribe too much value to things of comparatively small importance. Such an one not having discernment enough to perceive where the force and stress of duty lie, may innocently discredit religion by a too scrupulous exactness in points of small intrinsic value. And even well-

meaning men, as well as hypocrites, may think too much is done when their "mint" and "anise" are rigorously tithed.

But in observing the "weightier matters of the law," in the practice of universal holiness, in the love of God, there can be no possibility of exceeding, while there is no limitation in the command. We are in no danger of loving our neighbour *better* than ourselves; and let us remember, that we do not go beyond, but fall short of our duty, while we love him *less*. If we were commanded to

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love

love God with *some* of our heart, with *part* of our soul, and a *portion* of our strength, there would then be some colour for those perpetual cavils about the *proportion* of love, and the *degree* of obedience, which are due to him. But as the command is so definite, so absolute, so comprehensive, so entire; nothing can be more absurd than that unmeaning, but not unfrequent charge brought against serious persons, that *they are too strict*.

The foundation of this silly censure is commonly laid in the first principles of education, where an early separation

separation is systematically made between duty and pleasure. One of the first baits held out for the encouragement of children, is, that when they have done their *duty*, they will be entitled to some *pleasure*; thus forcibly disjoining what should be considered as inseparable. And there is not a more common justification of that idle and dissipated manner in which the second half of the Sunday is commonly spent, even by those who make a conscience of spending the former part properly, than that, “now they have done
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their duty, they may take their pleasure."

But while christian observances are considered as tasks, which are to be got over to entitle us to something more pleasant; as a burthen which we must endure in order to propitiate an inexorable Judge, who makes a hard bargain with his creatures, and allows them just so much amusement in pay for so much drudgery; we must not wonder that such low views are entertained of christianity, and that a religious life is reprobated as strict and rigid.

But

But to him who acts from the nobler motive of love, and the animating power of the christian hope, the exercise is the reward, the permission is the privilege, the work is the wages. *He* does not carve out some miserable pleasure, and stipulate for some meagre diversion, to pay himself for the hard performance of his duty, who in that very performance experiences the highest pleasure, and feels the truest gratification of which his nature is capable.

This reprobated strictness therefore, so far from being the source of

discomfort and misery, as is pretended, is in reality the true cause of actual enjoyment, by laying the axe to the root of all those turbulent and uneasy passions, the unre-served and yet imperfect gratification of which does so much more tend to disturb our happiness than that self-government christianity enjoins.

But all precepts seem rigorous, all observances are really hard, where there is not an entire conviction of God's right to our obedience, and an internal principle of faith and love

love to make that obedience pleasant,
A religious life is indeed a hard
bondage to one immersed in the
practices of the world, the flesh,
and the fashion. To a perfect christ-
tian, it is "perfect freedom." He
does not now abstain from such and
such things, merely because they are
forbidden (as he did in the first
stages of his progress), but because
his soul has no longer any pleasure
in them. And it would be the
severest of all punishments to oblige
him to return to those practices,
from which he once abstained with

difficulty, and through the less noble principle of fear.

There is not therefore perhaps a greater mistake than that common notion entertained by the more orderly part of the fashionable world, that a little religion will make people happy, but that an high degree of it is incompatible with all enjoyment. For surely *that* religion can add little to a man's happiness which restrains him from the commission of a wrong action, but which does not pretend to extinguish the bad principle from which the act proceeded. A religion

gion which ties the hands, without changing the heart; which, like the hell of Tantalus, subdues not the desire, yet forbids the gratification, is indeed an uncomfortable state. Such a religion, though it may gain a man something on the side of reputation, will give him but little inward comfort, if his heart be still left a prey to that temper which produced the evil, even though terror or shame may have prevented the outward act.

That people devoted to the pursuits of a dissipated life should conceive of religion as a difficult and
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even unattainable state, it is easy to believe. That they should conceive of it as an unhappy state, is the consummation of their error and their ignorance: for that a *rational* being should have his understanding enlightened; that an *immortal* being should have his views extended and enlarged; that a *helpless* being should have a consciousness of assistance; a *sinful* being the prospect of pardon; or a *fallen* one the assurance of restoration, does not seem a probable ground of unhappiness; and on any other subject such reasoning would not be admissible.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

A stranger, from observing the fashionable mode of life, would not take this to be a christian country.—Lives of professing christians examined by a comparison with the Gospel.—Christianity not made the rule of life, even by those who profess to receive it as an object of faith.—Temporizing divines contribute to lower the credit of christianity.—Loose harangues on morals not calculated to reform the heart.

THE christian religion is not intended, as some of its fashionable professors seem to fancy, to operate

operate as a charm, a talisman, or incantation ; and to produce its effect by our pronouncing certain mystical words, attending at certain consecrated places, and performing certain hallowed ceremonies: but it is an active, vital, influential principle, operating on the heart, restraining the desires, affecting the general conduct, and as much regulating our commerce with the world, our business, pleasures, and enjoyments, our conversations, designs and actions, as our behaviour in public worship, or even in private devotion.

That

That the effects of such a principle are strikingly visible in the lives and manners of the generality of those who give the law to fashion, will not perhaps be insisted on. And indeed the whole present system of fashionable life is utterly destructive of seriousness. To instance only in one particular amusement, which is generally thought insignificant, and is in effect so vapid, that one almost wonders how it can be dangerous: it would excite laughter, because we are so broke into the habit, were I to insist on the immorality of passing one's whole
7 life

life in a crowd. But those promiscuous myriads which compose the society, falsely so called, of the gay world; who are brought together without esteem, remain without pleasure, and part without regret; who live in a round of diversions, the possession of which is so joyless, though the absence is so insupportable; these, by the mere force of incessant and indiscriminate association, weaken, and in time wear out, the best feelings and affections of the human heart. And the mere spirit of dissipation, thus contracted from invariable habit, even detached from
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all its concomitant evils, is in itself as hostile to a religious spirit, as more positive and actual offences. Far be it from me to say that it is as criminal; I only insist that it is as opposite to that heavenly mindedness which is the essence of the christian temper.

We know that in the mingled mass which celebrate the orgies of dissipation, are many amiable and well-inclined hearts, whom nothing but the tyranny of fashion could have driven thither. But let us suppose an ignorant and unprejudiced spec-

spectator, who should have been taught the theory of all the religions on the globe, brought hither from the other hemisphere. Set him down in the politest part of our capital, and let him determine, if he can, except from what he shall see interwoven in the texture of our laws, and kept up in the service of our churches, to what particular religion we belong. Let him not mix entirely with the most flagitious, but only with the most fashionable; at least, let him keep what they themselves call *the best company*. Let him scrutinize into the manners, cus-

customs, conversations, habits, and diversions, most in vogue, and then infer what is the established religion of the land.

That it could not be the Jewish he would soon discover; for of rites, ceremonies, and external observances, he would trace but slender remains. He would be equally convinced that it could not be the religion of old Greece and Rome; for that enjoined reverence to the Gods, and inculcated obedience to the laws. His most probable conclusion would be in favour of the

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Mahometan faith, did not the excessive indulgence of some of the most distinguished, in an article of intemperance prohibited even by the sensual Prophet of Arabia, defeat that conjecture.

How would the petrified enquirer be astonished, if he were told that all these were of a religion meek, spiritual, self-denying; of which poverty of spirit, a renewed mind, and non-conformity to the world, were specific distinctions!

When he saw the sons of men of
fortune,

fortune, scarcely old enough to be sent to school, admitted to be spectators of the turbulent and unnatural diversions of racing and gaming; and the almost infant daughters, even of wise and virtuous mothers (an innovation which fashion herself forbade till now), carried with most unthrifty anticipation to the frequent and late-protracted ball; would he believe that we were of a religion which has required from these very parents, a solemn vow that these children should be bred up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?”

When he beheld those nocturnal clubs, so subversive of private virtue and domestic happiness, would he conceive that we were of a religion which in express terms "exhorts young men to be sober-minded?"

When he saw those magnificent and brightly-illuminated structures which decorate and disgrace the very precincts of the royal residence (so free itself from all these pollutions); when he beheld the nightly offerings made to the demon of play, on whose cruel altar the fortune and happiness of wives and children are offered up with-

without remorse ; would he not conclude that we were of some of those barbarous religions which enjoin unnatural sacrifices, and whose horrid deities are appeased with nothing less than human victims ? If any thing could add to his astonishment, it must be to observe, in some more private temples of this demon, that the fair sacrifice is often a voluntary one, self offered, and is at once both priestess and victim.

Now ought we not to pardon our imaginary spectator, if he should not at once conclude that all the

various descriptions of persons, above noticed, professed the christian religion; supposing him to have no other way of determining but by the conformity of their manners to that rule by which he had undertaken to judge them? We indeed ourselves must judge with greater latitude, and candidly take the present state of society into the account; which, in some few instances perhaps, must be allowed to dispense with that literal strictness, which more peculiarly belonged to the first ages of the Gospel.

But as this is really a christian country,

country, professing to enjoy the purest faith in the purest form; it cannot be unreasonable to go a little farther, and enquire whether christianity, however firmly established, and generally professed in it, is really practised by that order of fashionable persons, who, while they are absorbed in the delights of the world, and their whole souls devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, yet still arrogate to themselves the honourable name of christians, and occasionally testify their claim to this high character, by a general profession of their belief

in, and a decent compliance with, the forms of religion.

This enquiry must be made, not by a comparison with the state of christianity in other countries (a mode always fallacious, whether adopted by nations or individuals, is that of comparing themselves with those who are still worse); nor must it be made from any notions drawn from custom, decency, or any other human standard; but from a scripture view of what real religion is; from any one of those striking and comprehensive representations of it, which

which may be found condensed in so many single passages of the sacred writings.

Whoever then looks into the Book of God, and observes its prevailing spirit, and then looks into that part of the world under consideration, will not surely be thought very censorious, if he pronounce that the conformity between them does not seem to be *very* striking; and that the one does not very evidently appear to be dictated by the other. Will he discover that the christian religion is so much as pretended to be made
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the *rule of life* even by that decent order who profess not to have discarded it as an object of faith? Do even the more regular, who neglect not public observances, consider christianity as *the measure of their actions*? Do even what the *world* calls religious persons employ their time, their abilities, and their fortune, as talents for which they however confess they believe themselves accountable: or do they in any respect live, I will not say up to their profession (for what human being does so?), but in any consistency with it, or even with an eye to its predominant

nant tendencies? Do persons, in general of this description seem to consider the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel as any thing more than a form of words, necessary indeed to be repeated, and proper to be believed? But do they consider them as necessary to be adopted into a governing principle of action?

Is it consistent to declare in the solemn assemblies that they are "miserable offenders," and that "there is no health in them," and never in their daily lives to discover any symptom of that humility which should

should naturally be implied in such a declaration?

Is it reasonable, or consistent with good sense, earnestly to lament having "followed the desires of their own hearts," and then deliberately to plunge into such a torrent of dissipations as clearly indicates that they do not struggle to resist *one* of them? I dare not say this is hypocrisy, but surely it is inconsistency.

"Be ye not conformed to this world," is a leading principle in the book they acknowledge as their guide.

guide. But after unresistingly assenting to this, as a doctrinal truth, at church; how absurd would they think any one who should expect them to adopt it into their practice! Perhaps the whole law of God does not exhibit a single precept more expressly, more steadily, and more uniformly rejected. If it mean any thing, it can hardly be consistent with that mode of life emphatically distinguished by the appellation of *fashionable*.

Now would it be much more absurd (for any other reason but because
it

it is not the custom) if our legislators were to meet one day in every week, gravely to read over all the obsolete statutes, and rescinded acts of parliament; than it is for the order of persons of the above description to assemble every Sunday, to profess their belief in, and submission to, a system of principles, which they do not so much as *intend* shall be binding on their practice?

But to continue our enquiry.—

There is not a more common or more intelligible definition of human duty, than that of “Fear God, and
keep

keep his commandments." Now, as to the first of these inseparable precepts, can we, with the utmost stretch of charity, be very forward to conclude that God is really "very greatly feared," in secret, by those who give too manifest indications that they live "without him in the world?" And as to the latter precept, which naturally grows out of the other—without noticing any of the flagrant breaches of the moral law, let us only confine ourselves to the allowed, general, and notorious violation of the fourth commandment, and then enquire what apology
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can be offered for this, by believers at least, who scruple not to allow the authority of that book, which declares, among many other alarming denunciations, that the wilful and habitual offender in any one point is guilty of the breach of the whole law.

Shall we have reason to change our opinion, if we take another divine representation of the sum and substance of religion, and apply it as a touchstone in the present trial—

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c. and

thy neighbour as thyself?" Now, judging by inference, do we see many public proofs of that heavenly-mindedness which would be the inevitable effect of such a fervent and animated dedication of all the powers, faculties, and affections of the soul to him who gave it? And, as to the great rule of social duty expressed in the second clause, do we observe very much of that considerate kindness, that pure disinterestedness, that conscientious attention to the comfort of others, especially of dependants and inferiors, which might be expected from those who enjoy the privilege

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of so unerring a standard of conduct? a standard which, if impartially consulted, must make our kindness to others bear an exact proportion to our self-love: a rule in which christian principle, operating on human sensibility, could not fail to decide aright in every supposable case. For no man can doubt how he ought to act towards another, while the corresponding suggestions of conscience and feeling concur in letting him know how he would wish, in a change of circumstances, that others should act towards him.

Or

Or suppose we take a more detailed survey, by a third rule, which indeed is not so much the principle as the effect of piety—"True religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this : to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself *unspotted from the world.*" Now if christianity insists that obedience to the latter injunction be the true evidence of the sincerity of those who fulfil the former, is the beneficence of the fashionable world *very* strikingly illustrated by this spotless purity, this exemption from the pollutions of the world,

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which

which is here declared to be its infallible symptom?

But if I were to venture to take my estimate with a view more immediately evangelical; if I presumed to look for that genuine christianity which consists in “repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;” to insist that, whatever *natural* religion and *fashionable* religion may teach, it is the peculiarity of the *christian* religion to humble the sinner and exalt the Saviour; to insist that not only the grossly flagitious, but that *all*, have sinned; that *all* are by nature in a state of condemnation;

tion ; that *all* stand in need of mercy, of which there is no hope but on the Gospel terms ; that eternal life is promised to those *only* who accept it on the offered conditions of “ faith, repentance, and renewed obedience ; ” — if I were to insist on such evidences of our christianity as these ; if I were to express these doctrines in plain scriptural terms, without lowering, qualifying, disguising, or doing them away ; if I were to insist on this belief, and its implied and corresponding practices ; I am aware that, with whatever condescending patience this little tract might have been so

far perused, many a fashionable reader would here throw it aside, as having now detected the palpable enthusiast, the abettor of "strange doctrines," long ago consigned over by the liberal and the polite to bigots and fanatics. And yet, if the Bible be true, this is a simple and faithful description of christianity.

After having, however, just ventured to hint that such are indeed the humbling doctrines of the Gospel, to which alone eternal life is promised; I shall, in deep humility, forbear enlarging on this part of the subject,
which

which has been exhausted by the labours of wise and pious men in all ages. Unhappily, however, the most awakening of these writers are not the favourite guests in the closets of the more fashionable christians; who, when they happen to be more seriously disposed than ordinary, are fond of finding out some middle kind of reading, which recommends some half-way state, something between paganism and christianity, suspending the mind, like the position of Mahomet's tomb, between earth and heaven: a kind of reading which, while it quiets the conscience

by being on the side of morals, neither awakens their fears, nor alarms their security. By dealing in generals, it comes home to the hearts of none: it flatters the passions of the reader, by ascribing high merit to the performance of certain right actions, and the forbearance from certain wrong ones; among which, that reader must be very unlucky indeed who does not find some performances and some forbearances of his own. It at once enables him to keep heaven in his eye, and the world in his heart. It agreeably represents the readers to themselves as amiable persons;

persons ; guilty indeed of a few faults, but never as condemned sinners under sentence of death. It commonly abounds with high encomiums on the dignity of human nature ; the good effects of virtue on health, fortune, and reputation ; the dangers of a blind zeal, the mischiefs of enthusiasm, and the folly of being “ righteous over much :” with various other kindred sentiments, which, if they do not fall in of themselves with the corruptions of our nature, may, by a little warping, be easily accommodated to them.

These

These are the too successful practices of lukewarm and temporizing divines, who have become popular by blunting the edge of that heavenly tempered weapon, whose salutary keenness, but for their "deceitful handling," would oftener "pierce to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit."

But those feverer preachers of righteousness, who disgust by applying too closely to the conscience; who probe the inmost heart, and lay open all its latent peccancies; who treat of principles
as

as the only certain source of manners ; who lay the axe to the root, oftener than the pruning knife to the branch ; who insist much and often on the great leading truths, that man is a fallen creature, who must be restored, if he be restored at all, by means very little flattering to human pride—such as these will seldom find access to the houses and hearts of the more modish christians ; unless they happen to owe their admission to some subordinate quality of style ; unless they can captivate, with the seducing graces of language, those well-bred readers, who are childishly

childishly amusing themselves with the garnish, when they are perishing for want of food; who are searching for polished periods, when they should be in quest of alarming truths; who are looking for elegance of composition, when they should be anxious for eternal life.

Whatever comparative praise may be due to the former class of writers, when viewed with others of a less decent order, yet I am not sure whether so many books of frigid morality, exhibiting such inferior motives of action, and such moderate

rate representations of duty, have not done religion much more harm than good; whether they do not lead many a reader to enquire what is the lowest degree in the scale of virtue with which he may content himself, so as barely to escape eternal punishment; how much indulgence he may allow himself, without absolutely forfeiting his chance of safety; what is the uttermost verge to which he may venture of this world's enjoyment, and yet just keep within a possibility of hope for the next: adjusting the scales of indulgence and security with such a scrupulous
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equilibrium, as not to lose much pleasure, yet not incur much penalty.

This is hardly an exaggerated representation : and to these low views of duty is partly owing so much of that bare-weight virtue with which even christians are so apt to content themselves : fighting for every inch of ground which may possibly be taken within the pales of permission ; and stretching those pales to the utmost edge of that limitation about which the world and the Bible contend.

But

But while the nominal christian is persuading himself that there can be no harm in going *a little farther*, the real christian is always afraid of going too far. While the one is debating for a little more disputed ground, the other is so fearful of straying into the regions of unallowed indulgence, that he keeps at a prudent distance from the extremity of his permitted limits, and is as anxious in restricting as the other is in extending them. One thing is clear, and it may be no bad indication by which to discover the state of a man's heart to himself: while he is

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contending for this allowance, and stipulating for the other indulgence; it will shew him that, whatever change there may be in his life, there is none in his heart; the temper remains as it did; and it is by the inward frame rather than the outward act that he can best judge of his *own* state, whatever may be the rule by which he undertakes to judge of that of another.

It is less wonderful that there are not more christians, than that christians, as they are called, are not better men: for if christianity be not true,
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the motives to virtue are not high enough to quicken ordinary men to very extraordinary exertions. We see them do and suffer every day, for popularity, for custom, for fashion, for the point of honour, not only more than good men do and suffer for religion, but a great deal more than religion requires them to do. For her *reasonable service* demands no sacrifices but what are sanctioned by good sense, sound policy, right reason, and uncorrupt judgment.

Many of these fashionable professors even go so far as to bring their

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right

right faith as an apology for their wrong practice. They have a commodious way of intrenching themselves within the shelter of some general position of unquestionable truth. Even the great christian hope becomes a snare to them. They apologize for a life of offence, by taking refuge in the supreme goodness they are abusing. That "God is all merciful," is the common reply to those who hint to them their danger. This is a false and fatal application of a divine and comfortable truth. Nothing can be more certain than the proposition, nor
more

more delusive than the inference : for their deduction implies, not that he is merciful to sin repented of, but to sin continued in. But it is a most fallacious hope to expect that God will violate his own covenant, or that he is indeed "all mercy," to the utter exclusion of his other attributes of perfect holiness, purity, and justice.

It is a dangerous folly to rest on these vague and general notions of uncovenanted mercy; and nothing can be more delusive than this indefinite trust in being forgiven in

our *own* way, after God has clearly revealed to us that he will only forgive us in *his* way.

But the truth is, no one does truly trust in God, who does not endeavour to obey him. For to break his laws, and yet to depend on his favour; to live in opposition to his will, and yet in expectation of his mercy; to violate his commands, and yet look for his acceptance, would not, in any other instance, be thought a reasonable ground of conduct; and yet it is by no means as uncommon as it is inconsistent.

But

But the life of a dissipated christian seems to be a perpetual struggle to reconcile impossibilities : it is an endeavour to unite what God has for ever separated, peace and sin ; unchristian practices with christian observances ; a quiet conscience and a disorderly life ; a heart full of this world, and an unfounded dependance on the happiness of the next.

C H A P. VII.

View of those who acknowledge christianity as a perfect system of morals, but deny its divine authority.—Morality not the whole of religion.

AS in the preceding chapter notice was taken of that description of persons who profess to receive christianity with great reverence as a matter of faith, who yet do not pretend to adopt it as a rule of

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conduct; I shall conclude these slight remarks with some short animadversions on another set of men, and that not a small one, among the decent and the fashionable, who profess to think it exhibits an admirable system of morals, while they deny its divine authority; though that alone can make the necessity of obeying its precepts binding on the consciences of men.

This is a very discreet scheme: for such persons at once save themselves from the discredit of having their understanding imposed upon

by a supposed blind submission to evidences and authorities; and yet, prudently enough, secure to themselves, in no small degree, the reputation of good men. By steering this middle kind of course, they contrive to be reckoned liberal by the *philosophers*, and decent by the believers.

But we are not commonly to expect to see the pure morality of the Gospel very carefully transfused into the lives of such objectors. And indeed it would be unjust to imagine that the precepts *should* be most scrupu-

scrupulously observed by those who reject the authority. The influence of divine truth must necessarily best prepare the heart for an unreserved obedience to its laws. If we do not depend on that pardon and acceptance which christianity offers, we shall want the best motive to the actions and performances which it enjoins. A lively belief *must* therefore precede a very hearty and complete obedience. We are told, on the very best authority, that truth sanctifies the heart: and the same authority adds, that the "word of God is truth." That command therefore,

for instance, to set "our affections on things above," will operate but faintly, till that spirit from which the command proceeds touches the heart, and convinces it that no human good is worthy of the entire affection of an immortal creature. An unreserved faith in the promiser must precede our worthy performance of any duty to which the promise is annexed.

But as to a set of duties enforced by no other motive than a bare acquiescence in their beauty, and a cold conviction of their propriety, but im-

impelled by no obedience to his authority who imposes them; though we know not how well they might be performed by pure and impeccable beings, yet we know how they commonly *are* performed by frail and disorderly creatures, fallen from their innocence, and corrupt in their very natures.

Besides, nothing but a conviction of the truth of christianity can reconcile thinking beings to the extraordinary appearances of things in the Creator's moral government of the world. The works of God are an
enigma,

enigma, of which his word alone is the solution. The dark veil which is thrown over the divine dispensations in this lower world, must naturally shock those who consider only the single scene which is acting on the present stage; but is reconcileable to him who, having learnt from revelation the nature of the laws by which the great Author acts, trusts confidently that the catastrophe will set all to rights. The confusion which sin and the passions have introduced; the triumph of wickedness; the seemingly arbitrary disproportion of human conditions, accountable on

no scheme but that which the Gospel has opened to us—have all a natural tendency to withdraw from the love of God the hearts of those who erect themselves into critics on the divine conduct, and yet will not study the plan, and get acquainted with the rules, so far as it has pleased the Supreme Disposer to reveal them.

Till therefore the word of God is used as “a lamp to their paths,” men can neither truly discern the crookedness of their own ways, nor the perfection of that light by which they

they are directed to walk. And this light can only be seen by its own proper brightness ; it has no other medium. Till therefore “ the secret of the Lord ” is with men, they will not truly “ fear him ; ” till he has “ enlarged their hearts ” with the knowledge and belief of his word, they will not very vigorously “ run the way of his commandments.” Till they have acquired that “ faith without which it is impossible to please God,” they will not attain that holiness without which no man can see him.

And indeed if God has thought

fit

fit to make the gospel an instrument of salvation, we must own the necessity of receiving it as a divine institution, before it is likely to operate very effectually on the conduct. The great Creator, if we may judge by analogy from natural things, is so wise an œconomist, that he always adapts, with the most accurate precision, the instrument to the work; and never lavishes more means than are necessary to accomplish the proposed end. If therefore christianity had been intended for nothing more than a mere system of ethics, such a system surely might have been produced

duced at an infinitely less expence. The long chain of prophecy, the labours of apostles, the blood of saints, to say nothing of the great and costly sacrifice which the gospel records, might surely have been spared. Lessons of mere human virtue might have been delivered by some suitable instrument of human wisdom, strengthened by the visible authority of human power. A bare system of morals might have been communicated to mankind with a more reasonable prospect of advantage, by means not so repugnant to human pride. A mere scheme of
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conduct might have been delivered, with far greater probability of success, by Antoninus the emperor, or Plato the philosopher, than by Paul the tent-maker, or Peter the fisherman.

Christianity, then, must be embraced entirely, if it be received at all. It must be taken, without mutilation, as a perfect scheme, in the way in which God has been pleased to reveal it. It must be accepted, not as exhibiting beautiful parts, but as presenting one consummate whole, of which the perfection arises from coherence and dependence,

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from relation and consistency. Its power will be weakened, and its energy destroyed, if every caviller pulls out a pin, or obstructs a spring, with the presumptuous view of new-modelling the divine work, and making it go to his own mind. There is no breaking this system into portions of which we are at liberty to choose one, and reject another. There is no separating the evidences from the doctrines, the doctrines from the precepts, belief from obedience, morality from piety, the love of our neighbour from the love of God. If we pro-

fess christianity at all, if we allow the Divine Author to be indeed unto us "wisdom and righteousness," he must be also "sanctification and redemption."

Christianity, then, is assuredly something more than a mere set of rules; and piety, though it never pretended to be the substitute for a good life, is indispensably necessary to its acceptance with God. The Gospel never offers to make religion supersede morality, but every where clearly proves that morality is not the whole of religion. Piety is not

only necessary as a *means*, but is itself a most important *end*. It is not only the best principle of moral conduct, but is an indispensable and absolute duty in itself. It is not only the highest motive to the practice of virtue, but is a prior obligation; and absolutely necessary, even when detached from its immediate influence on practical goodness. Religion will survive all the virtues of which it is the source; for we shall be living in the noblest exercises of piety, when we shall have no objects on which to exercise many human virtues. When there
will

will be no distress to be relieved,
no injuries to be forgiven, no evil
habits to be subdued; there will
be a Creator to be blessed and
adored, a Redeemer to be loved
and praised.

F I N I S.

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